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SUBJECT: IMMEDIATE REACTION TO DEATH OF THE AMIR: KUWAITI OFFICIALS MOURN THE PASSING OF "BABA JABER"

REF: KUWAIT 93

¶1. (U) Summary. Following the return of the Prime Minister from an official trip to Oman, the Council of Ministers announced the accession to Amir of Crown Prince Shaykh Saad. Kuwaiti officials and political analysts have been giving interviews on the subject of the January 15 death of the Amir of Kuwait, Shaykh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The interviews also have focused on the accomplishments and personal qualities of Shaykh Jaber. Some have also commented on succession issues, emphasizing the stability of the regime and its policies, while avoiding speculation on the details of who they expect to fill key positions. End Summary.

Shaykh Saad Named Amir

¶2. (U) Kuwait television news' morning broadcast announced the death of the Amir and noted that there will be 40 days of mourning, the first three of which will be marked by the closure of all governmental offices. Later broadcasts focused on the details of the funeral. It was slightly unusual that the accession of Crown Prince Shaykh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah was not announced at the same time. However, upon the Prime Minister's return from Oman several hours after the Amir's death, the Council of Ministers met and the government officially announced that the Crown Prince Shaykh Saad would succeed as Amir.

Media Coverage

¶3. (U) The five major dailies hit the presses before learning of the Amir's death. Four of the papers have websites. However, only one -- al-Watan -- modified its website immediately to include the official pronouncement of the Amir's death on its homepage. In the early afternoon, Al-Qabas newspaper, posted an article describing the Amir's last hours, stating that his doctors were called at 3:45 AM but were unable to save him. Al-Qabas also reported that the heads of the ruling family will convene an extraordinary session of the Council of Ministers in the afternoon.

Arab Satellite Channels Interview Prominent Kuwaitis

¶4. (U) Bahrain-based satellite television station Al-Arabiya has been broadcasting almost continuous coverage of the Amir's death. A number of Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament (MPs), other government officials, and prominent political analysts have appeared in interviews, among them: Minister of Planning Masouma Al-Mubarak; MPs Hassan Johar, Ahmed al-Mulaifi, Faisal al-Muslim, Fahed Al-Khanna, Saleh Ashour, and Ali Al-Dosqbasi; former Director of Kuwait

University Fayza Al-Khorafi and political analyst Mohammad Al-Rumaihi. Many of their comments have focused on the late Amir's personal qualities. Many commentators -- especially those in government -- used the word "father" (Baba in Arabic) to describe the late Amir. Liberal MP Ahmed al-Mulaifi emphasized the Amir's qualities as a moderate person. Political analyst Mohammad al-Rumaihi noted that the Amir was a humble person.

¶5. (U) Most of the commentators highlighted some of the Amir's accomplishments they appreciated. Many mentioned the 1999 Amiri decree in support of women's political rights, which the Parliament finally approved in 2005; his establishment of investment funds to provide for Kuwait's welfare after it runs out of energy resources; and his leadership through the Iraqi invasion. Al-Rumaihi also claimed that the GCC was the Amir's brainchild.

Succession Speculation

¶6. (SBU) Although Crown Prince Shaykh Saad has succeeded to the position of Amir, he is unable to rule in practice because of his ill-health and Shaykh Sabah will continue to function as Kuwait's chief executive. Despite months of speculation on succession, most commentators avoided the issue in their interviews. One of the only people to address it was Mohammed Al-Jassem. (Note: Al-Jassem is the former editor of one of Kuwait's most prominent daily newspapers and an outspoken critic of the government. He has a website that he uses to launch quite pointed attacks at the government. End note.) He noted that the long-term succession issue is unclear because of the state of the Crown Prince's failing health. He expressed hope that one of the younger generation

KUWAIT 00000096 002 OF 002

would be elevated to Amir, rather than another septuagenarian. But unfortunately the ruling family did not work this out before the Amir's death. Al-Jassem expressed confidence that the ruling family always manages to work things out behind closed doors and that the State's policies would remain stable.

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